Software Bridge converts codes between files

Secretaries and data processing managers will cheer when they learn about **Software Bridge**, a program that allows users of IBM PC and compatible programs to "translate" files from one word processing program to another.

This may sound simple, but it's not. It's so difficult, in fact, that countless businesses routinely re-input hundreds of documents when they switch word processing programs. Now, here's a program that saves you all that work.

For example, let's say your company has three departments, each using a personal computer and each using a different word processing program.

This may sound illogical, but actually it's quite common. Often, the word processing needs of departments may be slightly different, resulting in the use of different programs. Or, an employee who already knew how to use a particular program might have been hired, and the program he or she knew was adopted by that department to save training time.

Prior alternatives all difficult

In such situations, the need invariably develops for computer files prepared on one word processing program to be used by one of the other departments. Everyone hopes this will never happen, but it always does. At first, just a document or two, and then more.

Finally, someone decides that the whole company should use just one word processing program, and at least two of the three departments need to convert all their files.

Before Software Bridge came along, here were the choices:

✔ Convert to ASCII code. Most word processing programs have the ability to convert files to this machine-readable code, which is pronounced "as-key" by technical people. But the conversion *does not* include things like margins, tabs, column codes, etc. Only the alphabetic and numeric characters remain, and only

these characters are read by the other word processing program. Your job then is to edit the files using the new word processing program and re-enter all the margins, tabs, etc.

✔ Re-enter the documents from scratch. Converting to ASCII and re-entering just the margins, tabs, etc., is often so complicated and time-consuming that most people find it easier just to retype the documents.

✔ Hire a programmer to build a custom translation program. This pays only if you have thousands of documents to convert. It's not done very often for this reason.

New alternative

Software Bridge, offered by Systems Compatibility Corp. (Chicago) for $249, does all the work for you — it actually translates the codes for margins, tabs, etc., from one word processing program to the equivalent codes in another. The result is a fully translated document in just a few seconds.

As with any new program, however, some disadvantages remain that probably will be addressed in future versions:

✔ Just a few of the most popular word processing programs are currently supported: Displaywrite 3 (releases through 1.00), MultiMate (versions through 3.20), Samna Word III (revisions through 2.0), WordPerfect (versions through 4.0), and WordStar (releases through 3.3). Though the company says that other popular programs are in the works, you're out of luck if you wish to convert a lesser-known program to one of the popular ones.

✔ All brand-new programs, regardless of type, have bugs and rough spots in the documentation that usually are corrected in future versions. For this reason, I usually recommend that new programs be avoided as long as possible. You'll have less aggravation working with later versions — which sometimes appear within weeks of the original. That's also why, by the way, it is always important to make sure you are getting the very latest version whenever buying software.

In this case, however, I can understand the temptation to jump in quickly. You might, for example, have an immediate need to convert many older WordStar files to the newer Word-Perfect program. (WordStar used to be the most popular word processing program, but now WordPerfect has taken the lead.) Be careful. Though it looks easy, there are still a few booby traps. Software Bridge does not claim to support the very latest WordPerfect release, 4.1. But since I know from experience that WordPerfect 4.1 will read most of my 4.0 files, you might want to try out the newly converted files first with 4.0 before running them with 4.1.

ADVICE: As with any newly released program you may be eager to use, it's wise to telephone the developers directly and discuss your needs with them or engage a knowledgable consultant to do your legwork. This will help you use the program most effectively — and in this case you might want to wait for a newer version that supports other word processing programs. Since the future productivity of you and your staff is at stake, it will be well worth the wait.

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